

September 20, 2024

Leigha Lemoine
H00312351

Dear Leigha:


This letter serves as the next step in the process for the Student Code for The South Carolina Technical College System ("Student Code"). As you may recall, you have been informed that certain matters were being reviewed as potential violations of the Student Code, and you have been asked to share your perspective on these matters.

SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATION

On Wednesday, September 11, 2024, Student Affairs received an email from Professor Audrey Heisler, Department Chair for Personal Care Programs, in which she forwarded an email from Professor Chelise Smith, Cosmetology Department. Professor Smith's email documented several concerns pertaining to you. In particular, students had reported concerns about a comment that you posted in a Snapchat group text. The comment that was of concern related individual who is not enrolled at the College, and you wrote that he should get "blasted". Students were unsure of your intent when you used the term "blasted."

The students who made the report to Professor Smith were interviewed and were asked to share their perspective on the Snapchat comment and to share their perspective concerning the impact of the comment on the learning environment. Students revealed that the comment made them feel uncomfortable and somewhat unsafe at certain times during the day while on campus. The students were also asked to share their perspectives on the overall learning environment in Cosmetology.

You were asked to share your perspectives about the Snapchat comment and on other matters related to the learning environment in the Cosmetology program. When asked about the Snapchat comment, you denied it having anything to do with physical harm. You explained that by writing "blasted", you meant that the person needed to be held accountable and called out for his behavior. You elaborated by stating you are not a Southerner. You explained that you are from the North and people from the North don't have guns. You stated that you and your parents don't own guns. You made comments deflecting personal association with firearms.

At the conclusion of the meeting, you asked if you were in trouble. You were told that, at this time, there was no evidence to find you in violation of the Student Code. The College had accepted your explanation for the Snapchat comment. 

On Friday, September 13, 2024, a screen recording of a video that had been posted to Instagram was submitted to Student Affairs, which depicted you firing a handgun. The Instagram post displayed the date of November 23, 2023.

As explained above, you had previously made a comment in the Snapchat group text using the term "blasted". The College had concluded that this post alone did not reach the level of a threat. However, the presence of the Instagram post of you firing the handgun generated questions about your original explanation of the term "blasted". This also presented concerns about the safety of

the campus. On Tuesday, September 17, 2024, the College met with you to discuss the Instagram video and the concerns about the safety of the campus. You were also notified you that you were being placed on "Interim Suspension," and you were provided with a letter explaining this status, in accordance with the Student Code.

When asked about the Instagram video, you stated that it was you firing the gun and that the situation happened last year around Thanksgiving. You also stated that this was the only time you had ever fired a gun and that this gun did not belong to you. You explained that the gun belonged to a friend and that this occurred in North Carolina. You voluntarily offered your consent for the College to search your belongings. However, no search of your belongings occurred. When asked why you posted the video, you responded that you did not see anything wrong with the video. You asked if you should delete the video, and you were informed that it would be up to you regarding whether or not you deleted the video. You stated that you were deleting the video during the meeting.

After this meeting with you, Dr. Melissa Batten, Vice President for Student Affairs, and Dr. Kristin Sawyer, Director of Student Development, interviewed Professors Audrey Heisler, Jada Strickland, and Chelise Smith. The purpose of these interviews was to gather additional information about the learning environment in the Cosmetology program.

Dr. Sawyer held another meeting with you via MS Teams on Wednesday, September 18, 2024, and asked you to share additional perspectives on the video and on the learning environment in the Cosmetology program.

These matters have been thoroughly investigated by meeting with you, faculty, and students; by reviewing Snapchat group text threads; and by considering the Instagram video.

CONDUCT DECISION

The investigation revealed that the video of you firing the handgun was already posted on Instagram when you stated that you were from the North and communicated that you have no personal association with firearms. In today's climate, your failure to disclose the existence of the video, in conjunction with group text message on Snapchat where you used the term "blasted," causes concern about your ability to remain in the current Cosmetology cohort. In addition, our review of the two facts raised above — 1) denying involvement with guns and 2) use of the term "blasted" — causes a significant amount of apprehension related to the presence and use of guns. Furthermore, the two facts have impacted the learning environment, causing both employees and students to express that they feel unsafe due to these circumstances.

For the reason, it has been determined that you are in violation of the following guidelines set forth in the Student Code for The South Carolina Technical College System:

E. Infringement of Rights of Others Infringement of rights of others is defined to include, but is not limited to the following:

5. Engaging in any activity that disrupts the educational process of the college, interferes with the rights of others, or adversely interferes with other normal functions and services.

CONDUCT SANCTIONS

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Therefore, disciplinary sanctions are appropriate, and the following sanctions are imposed, effective immediately:

SUSPENSION FROM THE COLLEGE

You are suspended effective immediately. Under no circumstance should you return to any Horry-Georgetown Technical College campus prior to the Fall Semester of 2025. During the suspension period, you may not return to the campus unless prior permission by the Chief Student Services Officer, or designee, has been granted by contacting Student Affairs at (843) 349-7550; otherwise, you will be arrested for trespassing. The suspension includes enrollment, but also revokes your privileges to participate in or utilize any on campus event, service, or activity until Fall Semester of 2025. For the duration of this suspension, there is a NO TRESPASS order in effect.

Once you have satisfied the terms of this suspension, you may submit a written request to reenroll at the Horry-Georgetown Technical College to the Office of Student Affairs. Following a review of your file, a decision regarding your ability to re-enroll will be made at that time.

DISCIPLINARY PROBATION

At the time you are deemed eligible to reenroll at Horry-Georgetown Technical College, you will be on disciplinary probation for the remainder of your enrollment at the College. Should there be any further violations of the Student Code during this time, more severe sanctions will result.

OPPORTUNITY TO APPEAL

Under the Student Code, you have the right to appeal this disciplinary decision, including the sanctions imposed against you. If you choose to appeal the decision, you must submit in writing the reason for the appeal within five (5) instructional days (by Friday, September 27, 2024) after receiving this decision. Any decision made or sanction imposed after the preliminary investigation may be held in abeyance should you decide to go before the Hearing Committee.

The complete instructions governing the appeal process are described in the Student Code which is published in the Horry-Georgetown Technical Academic Catalog and can be found online at www.hgtc.edu/catalog. If you have any questions regarding the appeal process, please contact me at Kristin.sawyer@hgtc.edu or (843) 349-5309.

Sincerely,

Kristin Sawyer, Ed.D.
Director of Student Development